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Iowa rolls out Great Places initiative at Clear Lake

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By PEGGY SENZARINO
Of The Globe Gazette

CLEAR LAKE — Every place in Iowa has a story.

Gov. Tom Vilsack's Iowa Great Places initiative is designed to help communities tell their stories by making it easier to get the help they need from state government.

In establishing the program, Vilsack called on state agencies to focus financial and technical resources, identifying ways to package resources as a "one-stop shop."

More than 100 North Iowans attended a public forum on the initiative Tuesday afternoon at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake.

"The labyrinth of state agencies can be daunting," said Anita Walker, director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, who facilitated the session.

The Great Places initiative asks communities to invite the state to partner with them, Walker said.

Partnership request letters are due July 1.

Between July 1 and early September, representatives from Great Places will visit with communities about their plans. By late September, three "pilot places" will be selected. Then each community and the state will negotiate partnership agreements.

The communities will receive coaching and state expertise to make their project reality.

"We expect there to be a lot of interest," Walker said.

"This is really a breakthrough for the way we do business in the state of Iowa. We are so excited to see so many people here eager to learn along with us."

Ventura Mayor Bob Wolfram and City Clerk Else Taylor were among the many city and county officials from around North Iowa who attended Tuesday's forum.

"She's been taking notes," Wolfram said, pointing to Taylor. "We've got a couple of projects we would like to do in town."

Reach Peggy Senzarino at 421-0532 or peggy.senzarino@globegazette.com

